

E-Learning for Your Small Business, 24/7

By Michael Pappas

More than ever before, the academic world relies on technology to help give students easier access to the kinds of information, course-work and instruction that are often out of the reach of ordinary Americans, either because of geography, costs or time constraints. Now, thanks to the Internet, business training is no exception.

At the U.S. Small Business Administration's extensive Web site, small business owners and entrepreneurs can now access an online virtual classroom of business courses, workshops, information resources, learning tools and counseling assistance through the agency's Small Business Training Network.

The Small Business Training Network is an Internet-based learning environment – operating like a virtual campus – offering online courses, workshops, publications, information resources, learning tools and direct access to electronic counseling, and other forms of technical assistance for entry level entrepreneurs and experienced business owners alike, for students, for home-based businesses and for women. There are key resources and suggested courses aimed at pre-venture businesses and growing businesses to meet all kinds of small business training needs.

The Training Network, available on the Web 24 hours a day, operates like an electronic umbrella under which many SBA and agency resource training programs are captured, aggregated, sorted by content and made available in multiple formats. It serves small business clients, agency resource partners, other federal agencies and global students of enterprise.

The Training Network was designed with the small business entrepreneur in mind to provide interactive business guidance on a range of topics. There are 12 training categories with more than 60 interactive courses and electronic guides that provide educational tools and resources on entrepreneurship. Many of the courses include audio sound bytes, quizzes and feedback.

Designed to help small businesses compete in a constantly changing, global environment, the Training Network makes SBA's business management resources available anytime and anywhere. Online course topics include Starting a Business, Business Management, Financing, Marketing & Advertising, Business Planning Tools, Government Contracting, Risk Management, E-Commerce, Federal Tax Training, International Trade and Small Business Retirement. The Training Network also includes a variety of learning tools and guides for easy access and learning, as well as a comprehensive electronic library.

Many of the learning opportunities offered by the Network are developed by cosponsors (academic institutions and corporations), some are developed by SBA's resource partners and some are developed internally through agency contracts. All of the offerings are free, most are self-paced and the majority are considered "topical primers."

In addition to a wide selection of online offerings, the Training Network serves as a window to all of the traditional, face-to-face technical assistance programs offered by the agency. Traditional training opportunities offered by SBA and its resource partners around the country can be easily identified by visiting <http://www.sba.gov/news/calendar/index.html>.

The Training Network's virtual library features more than 200 free e-books and publications, links to top business magazines and national newspapers, direct links to colleges and universities that offer other online business training courses and programs, and a section for young entrepreneurs to pursue their business interests. All of the SBA's Small Business Training Network's resources can be accessed online at www.sba.gov/training.

The SBA also manages Business.gov, the official business link to the U.S. Government, in partnership with 21 federal agencies. This partnership known as Business Gateway is a Presidential E-government initiative that provides a one-stop shopping resource for businesses needing access to compliance information, forms, and contacts. Businesses can access over 20,000 compliance-related documents from 94 federal Web sites. This website saves entrepreneurs time and effort, provides them with access to a consolidated list of official government compliance resources and most importantly provides entrepreneurs with one entry point. Visit www.business.gov for more information.

#

Michael Pappas
SBA Region II Administrator
(212) 264-7750

Michael Pappas is the regional administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration, Region II, with jurisdiction over Agency activities throughout New York State, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.